

Long Beach - Congresswoman Linda Sánchez joined a distinguished group of local leaders and educators today at the culmination ceremony for the Gang Alternatives Program (GAP) at McKinley Elementary School in Long Beach.

GAP is a non-profit organization that provides weekly, classroom lessons to elementary students on the dangers of, and alternatives to, gang involvement.

"We're here today to honor the work you have done to fight one of the biggest problems in our communities - gang violence," said Congresswoman Sánchez to the graduating fourth-graders. "As graduates of the Gang Alternatives Program, you are living proof that good young people will choose to do the right thing and avoid gangs when you know the facts."

Congresswoman Sánchez secured \$150,000 in 2005 to fund GAP programs at schools in Long Beach, Lynwood, South Gate, Watts and Willowbrook. This federal investment enabled GAP to reach 2,200 children in 8 schools over the last two years.

McKinley Principal Thomas Espinoza also welcomed Long Beach City Council Members Val Lerch and Bonnie Lowenthal, as well as Irene Mendoza, President of the GAP Board of Directors, for the ceremony.

"We're grateful for the additional resources that Congresswoman Sánchez has helped to secure for gang prevention education," said Long Beach Unified School District Superintendent of Schools Christopher J. Steinhauser in a statement. "It is vital that we steer our youngsters away from gangs, beginning at an early age."

Congresswoman Sánchez, a member of the House Committee on Education and Labor, also briefly talked about a comprehensive juvenile justice bill that she will introduce in Congress. The bill will complement conventional anti-gang enforcement programs by increasing federal support and local government authority to run gang-prevention initiatives.

"My bill on juvenile justice will build on the success of programs like GAP, which we know can work," said Congresswoman Sánchez. "We must confront violence at every stage, including before it happens."